

# Collecting Movie Posters & Related Memorabilia

by Bradford G. Boyle

Collecting movie posters and related memorabilia has been a hobby of many movie fans for a long time, but in the last decade it has become increasingly popular, pushing prices up at a dizzying rate. Those lucky enough to have purchased a poster from *The Wizard of Oz* in 1965 might have paid \$15 or so, while today the same poster would cost several thousand dollars.

Providing you could find one for sale. While some collectors actively speculate in posters, most buy as a hobby, collecting posters from their favorite movies for the love of it.

The market for the buying and selling of posters has become a well-organized, highly liquid market. Many stores have sprung up that deal exclusively in movie memorabilia. Before, most exchanges took place between collectors (many still do) but the existence of so many stores is proof of the growing demands (and profitability) of the marketplace. Poster stores usually charge higher prices than collectors, but it is much easier to find the item you are seeking. While a 'price-guide' for movie posters exists, it is by no means a 'bible', and the experienced collectors know that is he/she shops around, and has patience, a good deal of money can be saved.

## A SHORT HISTORY

Movie posters have existed since the beginning of movies. The first posters were stock posters; the posters were a general design, with a blank area for the theatre owner to fill in the movie he was currently showing. With the advent of the "star system" in Hollywood, posters began to be produced for each movie, usually depicting the leading performer(s). From their beginning, the posters have been printed in brilliant colors, to hopefully attract the passing glance of potential customers as they walked by the theatre. Originally, posters came in a variety of size, but soon the "one-sheet" became standard, measuring 28" x 42", which was later reduced to 27" x 41". The one sheet is still the most common poster. Other conventional types include three-sheets, six-sheets, half-sheets, inserts, window cards, lobby cards, and stills, which are not posters, but photographs issued with the movie.

## TYPES OF MOVIE POSTERS

**One-Sheets.** As mentioned, one-sheets are the most common types of poster. They are traditionally seen in display cases outside the theatre. Measuring 27" x 41", they are printed on paper, and usually are folded.

**Three-Sheets.** As you might have deduced, three-sheets are the size of three one-sheets, or 41" x 81". They are printed on paper, folded, and normally come in two pieces. Displayed, they fill a wall, and cost a bundle to frame. They are not as common as one-sheets, but are popular with collectors.

**Six-Sheets.** The formulas works were as well - six-sheets are six times as large as one-sheets, measuring 81" x 81". They are somewhat rarer than one or three sheets.

**Half-Sheets.** Also known as display posters, half-sheets measure 22" x 28", and unlike the other "sheet" posters, are printed on lightweight cardboard stock.

**Inserts.** Measuring 14" x 36", inserts are vertical posters, also printed on lightweight cardboard.

**Window Cards.** 14" x 22" on cardboard. The term "window card" originates from the fact that they were given to theatre owners to hang in other store's windows, usually in exchange for free movie passes. Often, window cards have hand-writing on them, telling where and when the movie was being shown.

**Lobby Cards.** Usually produced in sets of eights, lobby cards are small, measuring 11" x 14". They normally are displayed in the lobby of the theatre, thus their name.

One card in the set is the "title card", and contains the film's title and some credits, while the other seven are "scene cards" which depict, you guessed it, scenes from the film.

**Stills.** Not posters, stills are 8" x 10" photographs from the movie. They can either be black and white or color, and are easily duplicated. Stills are usually photographed separately from the movie, which can sometimes

own the one-sheet from *The Creature From the Black Lagoon*, how do you go about finding it? If you are willing to pay a premium price, a search of the dealers who specialize in movie posters will probably bring results. (See accompanying sidebar). A cheaper route is to find a fellow collector who is selling it. An excellent source is the tabloid *Movie Collector's World*, published every other week. It is packed full of ads from both collectors and dealers, as well as articles on films. As you get deeper into the hobby, you will build more and more contacts, and may soon find yourself part of "fandom" which is a loose-knit organization of fans world-wide. Visiting science fiction film (or Star Trek) conventions can also be a good source, and has the added benefits of haggling about the price, as well as allowing you to view the poster firsthand. Most major cities have film conventions, and the dealer rooms are a sight to behold. Tables and tables of movie memorabilia fill the room, and even wandering through them is fun.

Another method which used to sometimes work in the past is to ask theatre owners if they have any posters stored in the attic. Stories abound of collectors who were given priceless posters free of charge. Just for asking. This method probably won't work anymore, since theatre owners now are well-aware that old posters are valuable.

## STORING AND DISPLAYING POSTERS

OK, you've bought the one-sheet from *The Creature From The Black Lagoon*. Now what? You may want to get it framed, or simply store it. If you acquire many posters, you will soon find that there won't be enough wall space to display them all. Unless of course, you are rich and own a large mansion.

**Movie Collector's World**  
PO Box 309  
Fraser, MI 48206

- A must for any collector, a year's subscription is \$26.

**Bill Cole Enterprises**  
PO Box 60  
Wollaston, MA 02170

- Sellers of mylar bags in many poster sizes. Write for a free catalog.

**La Bell Epoque**  
1111 Gayley Avenue  
Los Angeles, CA 90024  
(213) 208-8449

- Specializing in old, rare posters, they also offer a search service.

**Gone Hollywood**  
172 Bella Vista Avenue  
Belvedere, Is., CA 94920  
(415) 435-1929 (noon - midnight PDT)

- Over 20,000 vintage posters in stock, and offers a complete restoration department.

This is by no means a complete list. The dealers listed are but a sample to help you get started.

The best course is to display your favorites and store the rest. Most collectors store their posters in specially manufactured mylar bags. Unlike plastic, mylar is uncontaminated by harmful chemicals that cause premature decay of posters. They are available in sizes to fit most types of posters. Keep posters away from direct sunlight, extreme temperature changes, and humidity.

If you do want your poster framed, be aware that it needs special treatment. All framing materials that will come into contact with it must be acid-free, or they will cause

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**Bette Davis**  
"Dark Victory"  
with GEORGE BRENT • HUMPHREY BOGART  
Geraldine Fitzgerald  
Ronald Reagan  
Directed by Edmund Goulding  
Cora Witherspoon  
Henry Travers  
A Warner Bros. Presentation

Vintage posters from the golden days of Hollywood are in great demand. "Dark Victory" starred not only Bette Davis and Humphrey Bogart, but also a lesser known actor who went on to play much greater roles.



The "one-sheet" from John Huston's classic, *The Maltese Falcon*, is currently valued about \$4,000.

result in scenes that get edited out of the final print.

## WHERE TO BUY MOVIE POSTERS

Once you have decided that you must